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# Freeway comments blitz planners

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The Arizona Republic  
Jan. 12, 2007 12:00 AM

With only days to go before the deadline for public input, Ahwatukee Foothills residents have flooded the community's planner with questions and comments about the proposed South Mountain Freeway.

The most recent two questions favor the freeway, a stark contrast to the scores of comments and inquiries opposed to the \$1.7 billion project.

The proposed 10-lane, 22-mile freeway is the most contentious issue in the small-but-growing Foothills portion of Phoenix because traffic planners have picked Pecos Road as the most likely route for the South Mountain leg of Loop 202, which was designed to ring the Valley.

The Pecos Road alignment would mean the demolition of about 250 homes, twice that many if the freeway is built below ground level.

Because the freeway is a hot-button issue, the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee began gathering comments and questions about the issue in late October. The committee set a deadline of Monday to receive comments and questions to be forwarded to the Arizona Department of Transportation.

Chris Hood, Ahwatukee Foothills' village planner, said she would group the comments by category, including design, local traffic impacts, environmental concerns and others.

"It's going to be kind of a table form because there are 19 pages worth, so it's hard to take into account all the comments at once," she said.

The Village Planning Committee, which is opposed to the freeway, will decide how to handle the comments at its next meeting at 6 p.m. Jan. 22 at the new Pecos Community Center, 17010 S. 48th St.

ADOT plans to incorporate the comments into its draft environmental impact statement being prepared as required by the Federal Highway Administration.

"Quite honestly, a lot of those questions have been addressed in the EIS already," ADOT spokesman Matt Burdick said.

He said the questions would not be answered until the final EIS is completed later this year.

"If the information hasn't been reviewed by the FHWA, we'll have to say that, kind of stay tuned," Burdick said. "The actual answers will come in a written format."

More than 80 comments have been submitted to the committee so far covering a wide range of issues that surround the freeway, both during construction and afterward. The vast majority of them have been opposed to the freeway, but two of the most recent questions have been in favor of the project.

"Is there a committee that supports the freeway that I can come to meetings on and

help with their efforts?" Ralph G. Baca wrote. "All I hear about is a committee that does not support it and wants to sue ADOT to keep it from happening.

"I would like to channel my efforts into making it happen as I have lived in Ahwatukee for 12 years now awaiting the day I do not have to go through central Phoenix to get to the west side."

Ahwatukee resident Susi Fathauer agreed, writing, "Can't wait until they finally get started on the Pecos (sic) Freeway. I've been waiting since we moved here in 1989 for the route to be built."

But the vast majority of comments sent to the village planning committee have been in opposition to the freeway.

"ADOT plans show that three cuts up to 20 stories high and more than two football fields wide would be carved through South Mountain Park if a proposed freeway is built along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee Foothills to connect with 55th Avenue in Laveen," Kevin Janke wrote. "This is unacceptable. Make ADOT find another way."

Residents who identified themselves only by their first names, Gene and Patti, wrote that they're worried about impacts on the environment, plus their home value.

"The proposed plan would eliminate my neighbors' homes across the street," Gene wrote. "I guess we would be looking at a huge wall on the other side of our street.

"Our concerns center mainly around increased noise and air quality. I shudder at the thought of a road the size of I-10 on the other side of the wall."

Two residents suggested that ADOT use its planned widening of I-10 south of Ahwatukee Foothills as a bargaining chip to build the proposed South Mountain Freeway on land owned by the Gila River Indian Community.

"If the Gila River Indian Community does not want the Pecos (sic) Freeway on their land, why are we talking with them about widening I-10. I think one should help the other," Alan Haugen wrote.

"If they finally decide not to have the Pecos (sic) Freeway then we should not wide (n) I-10."

But ADOT and the community have already stuck a deal to widen that portion of the I-10 freeway. The community's tribal council passed a resolution in 2005 that states recommendations for the I-10 widening were "not contingent" on other transportation corridors.

More recently, the Gila River community's tribal council passed a resolution establishing a transportation team to begin "exploratory negotiations" with ADOT over various roadways, including the South Mountain Freeway.

ADOT spokesman Burdick said this week that the agency's discussions with the council so far have involved only the I-10 widening and that the South Mountain Freeway would not be used in a *quid pro quo*.

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